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ABSTRACT

Extensive commitment to the remedial "tracking approach" over many years by the City Colleges of Chicago has not produced the desired outcomes. The results of several studies indicate that: student achievement in remedial courses has not resulted in improved performance in regular college courses; student and institutional retention is very low; and enrollment in remedial courses has a highly adverse effect upon the student's self-concept. The results of various City Colleges of Chicago studies on "low ability students" employing more recent approaches to corrective learning indicate that: (1) in classes using the mastery learning concept, student achievement and retention are not only superior to those attained in remedial program efforts, but are generally higher than achievement and retention of students in the regular programs and courses taught in non-mastery fashion; (2) well-planned supportive materials and services can compensate for poor college preparation; and (3) cooperative staff and faculty efforts in improving the learning process can result in more successful college learning experiences for more college students. Thus, remediation does not have to come in the form of segregated remedial courses. (Author/MB)

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REMEDIAL EDUCATION

A Position Paper
by
Hymen M. Chausow

The Problem in Its Setting

The community college, an open-admissions college offering a comprehensive program of post-secondary education, attracts hundreds of thousands of students to its doors annually. Some of them arrive lacking many of the basic skills needed for success in college.

The time-honored way of handling students with deficiencies is to delay their entrance into the regular college-level courses in English, mathematics, or what have you. This, we say, is for their own good. We shunt them off into "remedial" classes, where, so holds the popular wisdom, they will receive the learning experiences that ready them for entry into the regular program of the college.

Providing effective remedial instruction is a problem for any college. Experience in the City Colleges and elsewhere, unfortunately, makes it clear that in this instance the popular wisdom is untrustworthy: remedial courses do not prepare significant numbers of students for successful performance later on in college-level courses. They are often expensive exercises in futility.

The time has come to find new approaches to this perennial problem. The thesis of this paper is that any student who comes to us after high school graduation, and is ready and willing to learn, can be immediately successful in regular college courses which do not require his or her having successfully completed prerequisite courses. No student can be successful in Calculus

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unless he has mastered College Algebra. But he can be successful in the first college course in mathematics if he is given enough support.

A pre-condition to effective remediation is an awareness and understanding by administrators and teachers of the needs of inadequately prepared students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The teacher, of course, is always the prime factor. He or she must learn to state course objectives clearly and design meaningful learning experiences that give the student practice in the behaviors required for achievement of the objectives.

The 1974 Master Plan of the City Colleges of Chicago devotes considerable attention to the problem of remediation. A major section ("New Strategies to Improve Learning," pp. 124-37) argues that productive remedial instruction cannot be implemented unless an analysis is made of students' needs, the kinds of learning experiences that will maximize chances for success are selected, and the teacher is willing to cast himself or herself in the new role of manager and planner. We are convinced that these three elements affecting the student, the learning situation, and the teacher must be meshed if the student with learning deficiencies is to be given a real chance to succeed.

In the interest of providing the instructional services appropriate to every part of a continuum that includes at one end the student in need of intensive remedial work, and at the other the student so highly motivated he is capable of working on his own, the City Colleges have established two new colleges, both recipients of North Central Association recognition. The Chicago City-Wide College (CCWC) offers the student a range of "open" or alternative

learning options through programs of instruction presented off campus and via the mass media. The Chicago Urban Skills Institute (CUSI) serves adults at the other end of the spectrum, adults without high school diplomas seeking high school equivalency and entry-level job skills.

These two colleges, added to the seven traditionally organized colleges, are helping fill in the gaps and are giving the City Colleges the capability of serving all students who come to an open-admissions institution, no matter where they may fall along the scale of ability and prior preparation.

In this paper we shall limit ourselves to discussing programs for students who enroll in the City Colleges other than CUSI--in other words, those who arrive with the high school diploma or its equivalent. We shall make a number of assumptions as well, an important one of which is that we have reason to be encouraged by the motivation of the high school graduates who enter the community college. After all, if they are motivated enough to continue school beyond the age of compulsory attendance--or to return to school later in life--despite whatever deficiencies they may have in basic learning skills, they are entitled to a full and a genuine college experience.

Can we continue to send many of them to the "penalty box" known euphemistically as the remedial course? Or should we face up frankly to the bankruptcy of the remedial course and seek out more productive approaches?

We have invested large sums and expended much effort over the years in remedial classes and programs that do not remediate,

but succeed only in leaving their victims embittered and frustrated. In recent years, as what follows will show, we in the City Colleges have been exploring approaches that hold much more promise for the student with learning deficiencies.

Previous Experiences in the City Colleges of Chicago

Thirty years ago, the author of this paper, while an instructor in the Social Science Department of Wright College of the City Colleges, took part in a study conducted by Dr. Ralph Tyler of the University of Chicago that had as its goal establishing standards for the successful completion of the G.E.D. Examination. As part of that study, the author and two colleagues developed a procedure whereby students who had failed the G.E.D. and had scored at ten or below on the A.C.T. were identified and randomly grouped in control and experimental classes. They were all high school graduates, but, obviously, were in need of additional help if they hoped to be successful in the regular introductory Social Science course.

Each student in the experimental group met once a week individually with an instructor for general advising and tutoring sessions. Students in this group outperformed those who did not receive this supportive advising and instruction. Not only were there no "dropouts," but the gradepoint average of the experimental students was approximately C+. The control students, who did not receive the special attention, had a seventy to eighty percent "dropout" rate. Only one student in this group achieved a grade above D. It should be noted, by the way, that these remedial-level students were enrolled in the regular college Social Science course.

Experience at the former Wilson College (now Kennedy-King

College) over a ten-year period during which students "not prepared" for regular college work were placed in a one-year Basic Program sequence is likewise instructive. Data show that fewer than five percent of students who completed the Wilson Basic Program were successful when they moved into the regular college program. A University of Illinois doctoral candidate did a longitudinal follow-up study of students in the Wilson basic program several years ago. His investigation disclosed that only one student had received the BA degree to date.

Speaking of the Wilson program, this writer recalls an interesting experience he had at an educational conference in the late 1960's. A group of student leaders from what was still known as Wilson College approached him, and, in the course of discussion, asserted that their fellow students would no longer get involved in any so-called Basic Program which "led nowhere." They had no intention of spending a whole year in college without receiving any bona fide college credit. As a result of the dissatisfaction and unrest of the students concerned--and the poor results--the Basic Program was discontinued at Wilson College.

During the same period, the City Colleges had a further illuminating--and discouraging--experience with an elaborate and expensive experimental program called "Project Success," in which eight faculty members worked with sixty students in an intensive remedial program that extended over a two-year period. The results revealed no significant difference in student achievement or student retention levels. For that matter, even had "Project Success" proved successful, its complex and costly methodology could not have been replicated throughout the City Colleges system. Sufficient

resources could never have been found.

Yet another experience that prompted the thesis of this paper occurred at Malcolm X College when a "no-failure" policy was introduced. In a Central Administration pre-North Central Association Evaluation Visit meeting with students, I asked them if they were acquainted with the former remedial Basic Program at what is now called Kennedy-King College. They informed me that they were well aware of what had occurred. I then raised the question: Isn't it possible, under a no-failure policy, for students to spend an entire year in college without receiving any college credit just as happened to students in the Basic Program? Their response went something like this: "You just don't understand. We are not interested in receiving college credit that is not worth anything. Don't you see that we now have the opportunity to get supportive help in the new Learning Resources Center at Malcolm X. With this extra help we can earn credit that means something in the regular college program."

This Malcolm X exchange underlined an important point: by placing students in a regular college program, a college does not necessarily lower its academic standards. Note that the student spokesmen asserted that they wanted no part of worthless credits!

Does the record show that academic standards were compromised in any way at Malcolm X when the "no-failure" policy was introduced--with all students placed in the regular college classes, but provided supportive services in a well-equipped and professionally staffed Learning Center? A study was made of the grades awarded at Malcolm X College and at Kennedy-King College over a two-year period. It is significant that the number of "A", "B", and "C"

grades did not increase at Malcolm X. Rather, fewer "A", "B", and "C" grades were given there than at Kennedy-King College. It seems, rather, that during the two-year period of the study standards at Malcolm X were stiffened.

Now let us look at an experiment designed to help all students succeed in regular college-level classes at another college of the Chicago system which enrolls large numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. At Olive-Harvey College a trial was made of a Mastery Learning method developed in large part by Professor Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago. The trial project ran from 1972 to 1975, and was able to call upon Dr. Bloom as advisor. Olive-Harvey students deficient in basic skills were not placed in remedial courses, but in regular college courses, with some placed in courses taught according to mastery principles. The evidence is clear that students who followed the Mastery Learning procedures and who took advantage of the supportive services available generally achieved higher grades than did students of comparable backgrounds in regular control classes.[1]

In a research paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference in New York (1976), Professor Amiel T. Sharon reported on the effectiveness of remedial activities in junior colleges. He analyzed the performance of one group of students enrolled in a remedial English course and that of students of comparable backgrounds enrolled in a regular English course. Follow-up studies were conducted to learn how well both groups of students performed in the regular English course, after one had completed a

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[1] c.f., ERIC Topical Paper Number 53.

remedial course and the other had repeated the regular course which they had failed the first time around. After noting that the remedial course did no more to prepare students than failure the first time in the regular course, he states:

> . . .for the few academically unprepared students who fail the course and consequently take it again, it (the regular course) will, in effect, be a remedial course the first time they take it. The placement problem would be eliminated because the misplacement of able students who could pass the regular course will not be possible.

It should be noted that students placed in the regular English course who were classified as remedial did not receive any additional supportive services.

The Case for Supportive Services

Our contention, supported by data from the Olive-Harvey College Experiment, is that, with adequate supportive services, remedial-level students who enroll in a regular college course can be successful.

I recall another relevant experience I had as a Social Science instructor in the early 1950's, a time when considerable interest was shown in the development of critical thinking skills in general education. Wright College of the City Colleges of Chicago was one of seventeen colleges and universities in the nation selected to participate in a study of how to teach critical thinking skills directed by Dr. Paul Dressel of Michigan State University. The Wright College Social Science Department agreed to experiment with methods of helping students achieve critical thinking skills as well as participate in the development of pre- and post-test instruments.

Once the pre- and post-tests had been developed and administered, it was discovered that there was no significant difference in performance from one test to the other in the general Social Science course. Many "experts" concluded immediately that community college students in general education courses could not achieve critical thinking objectives, and that critical thinking was too much to ask of them. By applying the Tyler rationale to the problem, however, and by organizing a set of learning experiences related to the objective of critical thinking, we at Wright were able to demonstrate that community college students can achieve critical thinking skills at the one percent level of significance.

We hear much the same thing today about education for remediation. Since so many of "our kind of students" cannot achieve in regular college courses, let us relegate them to special classes so that our regular classes are not contaminated. I submit that what we at Wright College learned in the critical thinking experiment--and what we are now discovering with Mastery Learning teaching in our campuses--is just as true as ever: any high school graduate who comes to us can be placed in a college-level class and be successful, provided he or she is given appropriate supportive instruction.

Nowadays many adults, young and old, want a college education. Whether they elect bacclaureate or career programs, these students deserve to be given the opportunity of a college career without being "side-tracked." Edward B. Fiske, education writer for the New York Times, neatly summed up the issue of remedial

versus "regular" instruction in a recent article on the Mastery Learning techniques, when he stated that "given enough time and the right kind of learning exercises, just about every student can learn what a teacher has to offer."

New Approaches

The City Colleges of Chicago are committed to applying Mastery Learning strategies in the regular college courses. A series of discussions have been held between Dr. Benjamin Bloom and members of the faculty and the administration about the desirability of extending the Olive-Harvey College practice (described in the ERIC report cited above) to the other seven colleges of the City Colleges of Chicago system. Dr. Bloom, who recognizes the community college as fertile ground for mastery learning, presented a special in-service seminar for eighty faculty members of the City Colleges of Chicago representing eight disciplines and Counseling during the Spring 1976 Quarter at the University of Chicago.

A two-week intensive workshop, in which Dr. Bloom participated, was presented to thirty-five additional teachers between May 16 and May 27, 1977, under the auspices of our own Center for Instructional and Staff Development. Next year these teachers will join those who attended the University of Chicago seminar in teaching classes in accordance with the Mastery Learning system.

The Mastery Learning strategy associated with Professor Bloom rests on the premise--a fairly radical one in higher education--that most students enrolled in our colleges can achieve at a high level, provided the instruction is geared to carefully expressed goals, is presented in units of manageable size, and allows for

frequent give-and-take between instructor and student so that problems can be spotted and remedies promptly prescribed. And, as the Olive-Harvey project demonstrated, this can be achieved within the conventional format of college instruction--unlike other mastery learning methods which presuppose individualized instruction and flexible time frames.

All of Professor Bloom's research leads him to this conclusion: ". . . . what any person in the world can learn, almost all persons can learn, if provided with appropriate current conditions of learning."

When asked at a faculty meeting if "our kinds of students" can handle mathematics in a single semester, or do they need more time, Dr. Bloom responded that in experiments which he has conducted, whenever a one-semester course was expanded to a full-year, no significant differences in student performance were recorded. His conclusion is that the crucial element is not the amount of time a student puts in. Rather, it is what he does with the time he has.

Mr. Emmett Jones, coordinator of the City Colleges of Chicago Mastery Learning Project at Olive-Harvey, commented in a recent letter to me that:

> The Mastery Learning Strategy, as proposed by Dr. Benjamin S. Bloom, offers an excellent procedure by which so-called "unready" Chicago City College students can reach high levels of achievement in regular college courses. The strategy, when properly understood and followed, assures that the student will master one unit of instruction before proceding to the next. Such a procedure makes it unnecessary for a student to feel compelled to drop out of a class after two, three, five, or however many weeks because they are too far behind to catch up.

Bloom points out that a student who would in most colleges be placed in a remedial section may need five times as much time to master a first unit as does the student who scores an "A" on the first try. But, by the time he reaches the third unit of the course, this same student may need only three times the time, and only one and one-half the time to complete the last course unit as does the "A" student. This is our "high-risk" student, usually the occupant of a chair in a remedial course at many institutions. Most important, mastery learning teachers enable the "remedial" student to perform at the level of the A or B student. Not only does he pass, he passes at a mastery level.

Dr. Bloom also is an advocate of making a so-called "manager of learning experiences" a member of the instructional team. The manager is a para-professional whose duties include making certain that students take formative pretests and complete the corrective assignments prescribed by the teacher. Should students miss a class, the "manager" telephones him, chats with him in the student lounge, and encourages him to persevere. The "manager", too, assists the instructor in other ways by keeping records and doing peripheral chores for which the instructor has little or no time. Currently, we are assigning managers in each of the discipline-areas involved in the Mastery Learning experiment. There is already evidence the use of the manager can improve student retention.

Supportive instruction--often "corrective exercises" in Bloom's terminology--can come in many forms: paper-and-pencil work, classroom instruction, uses of the media of television, film, the computer. An instructor in Economics, for example, has produced a set of five-to-ten-minute videocassette modules on essential

economic concepts. These are available to students in the Learning Resources Center of a College. Whenever they encounter difficulty in understanding a particular key concept, the instructor recommends that they view--and re-view, if necessary--the specific videocassette dealing with it. A catalog of other videocassette modules is also available in a Learning Resource Center to help the disadvantaged student locate materials that aid in concept-mastery.

Several of the colleges also have had individualized computer-assisted instruction capability for the past three years through PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations), whose terminals are connected to a computer at the University of Illinois, Urbana. More than one hundred faculty members have participated in various in-service courses given by the University of Illinois and have received local fellowships to develop learning materials for the PLATO System. To date, our studies show that students participating in the PLATO Project are developing additional skills and understandings, and are receiving higher course grades than do students who have not participated in PLATO.

In addition to videocassettes and PLATO, a variety of programmed learning materials in a variety of disciplines are stored in libraries. Enough research with individualized, programmed instruction has been done to indicate that properly programmed materials enable students to achieve course objectives at a high level.

Face-to-face support is, of course, indispensable. The City Colleges of Chicago have been utilizing and intend to continue to utilize special disadvantaged grants to design and provide supportive services for disadvantaged students--services needed by these students if they are to achieve any measure of success in college. These funds are used primarily for tutoring and counseling services.

Findings on the basis of preliminary evaluations indicated that the new approaches to remedial education described above can be carried on within regular college-level courses and course sequences. Students who formerly would have been segregated in remedial courses can be successful in the regular track if such supportive measures are employed. Not only can they be successful, but their attitudes towards learning can be altered for the better by the success they achieve in mastery learning classes or classes providing such instructional support.

Conclusion

Extensive commitment to the remedial "tracking approach" over many years by the City Colleges of Chicago has not produced the desired outcomes. The results of several studies pertaining to the effectiveness of the "tracking approach" indicate that

1) student achievement in remedial courses has not resulted subsequently in improved performance in regular college courses;

2) student and institutional retention is very low in remedial programs;

3) enrollment in remedial courses has a highly adverse effect upon the student's self-concept, as well as upon his motivation for learning.

The results of various City Colleges of Chicago studies on

"low-ability students" employing more recent approaches to corrective learning indicate that

1) in mastery learning classes using the mastery learning concept, student achievement and retention are not only superior to those attained in "remedial program efforts," but are generally higher than the achievement and retention of students in the regular programs and courses taught in non-mastery fashion;

2) well-planned supportive materials and services can compensate for poor college preparation;

3) cooperative staff and faculty efforts in improving the learning process can result in more successful college experiences for more college students.

Thus, remediation does not have to come in the form of segregated remedial courses.

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